



Overview

Montana Milestones is the Part C Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, part of the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. This document outlines the intent and requirements of Montana's Early Intervention (EI) program.

The Mission of Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities

Early intervention builds upon and provides supports and resources to assist family members and caregivers to enhance children's learning and development through everyday learning opportunities.

To realize this mission, the Early Intervention (EI) program is built upon seven key principles:

1. Infants and toddlers learn best through everyday experiences and interactions with familiar people in familiar contexts;
2. All families, with the necessary supports and resources, can enhance their children's learning and development;
3. The primary role of an Early Interventionist is to work with and support family members and caregivers in children's lives;
4. The early intervention process, from initial contacts through transition, must be dynamic and individualized to reflect the child's and family members' preferences, learning styles and cultural beliefs;
5. IFSP outcomes must be functional and based on children's and families' assessed needs and family-identified priorities;
6. The family's priorities, needs and interests are addressed most appropriately by a Family Support Specialist, EI service coordinator for the State of Montana, who represents and receives team and community support; and
7. Interventions with young children and family members must be based on explicit principles, validated practices, best available research, and relevant laws and regulations.

Agreed upon Mission and Key Principles for Providing Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments. (ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/families/Finalmissionandprinciples3_11_08.pdf)

Federal Early Intervention Law

The Intent of the Law

In the 2004 re-authorization of the federal IDEA law, which includes both Part C (early intervention) and Part B (special education, both preschool and school age), the United States Congress asserted:

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society; and improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” [Public Law 108-446, Section 601(c)(1)]

Moreover, in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, Congress acknowledged an urgent and substantial need to:

- Enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities;
- Reduce the educational costs to our society by minimizing the need for special education and related services;
- Maximize the potential for individuals with disabilities to live independently in society;
- Enhance the capacity of families to support the development of their children; and
- Enhance states’ ability to coordinate funding to provide services for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

[Public Law 108-446, Section 635(a)(1)- (5)]

Provisions of the Law

The key components of the Part C Early Intervention law include:

- Child Find through early identification of needs;
- Eligibility determination conducted by a team that includes parents and professionals from multiple disciplines who uses various pieces of information across all developmental domains, including hearing, and vision;
- A Service Coordinator, Montana’s Family Support Specialist, is the key contact for the family who has responsibilities to work on behalf of the family and child through eligibility determination, Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) development, and service access, provision, and monitoring;
- Services that occur in natural environments, or in locations where typically developing children are within everyday routines, activities, and with familiar people;
- Parents have rights in the program and procedural safeguards are in place through rule and in accordance with the federal law; and
- Early Intervention services are provided by qualified personnel through an IFSP to address outcomes.

The full text of the law can be found online (<http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html>), as can the accompanying regulations (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-28/pdf/2011-22783.pdf>). These requirements are met by the **Montana Milestones** EI Program.

Montana and Early Intervention

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), the Part C lead agency, has engaged stakeholders in discussions about the intent and requirements of IDEA, the research and literature about the evidence for best practice in providing EI services, and the process for creating and articulating a clear, unified, consistent message for the provision of EI services.

Montana Milestones Early Intervention service (EIS) providers make available early intervention services under Part C of IDEA. An **Early Intervention service provider** is defined according to Montana's Part C Compliance Document: Conformity with Federal Rules and Regulations for the Early Intervention Program of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA), July 2013, as an entity (whether public, private, or nonprofit) or an individual providing early intervention services under Part C of the Act, and may include, where appropriate, the lead agency and a public agency responsible for providing early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities in the State under Part C of the Act. In Montana, the **Early Intervention service provider** is also referred to as Early Intervention Service agency, Part C service provider or Part C agency.

The following are the types of qualified personnel who provide early intervention services:

- Audiologists
- Family therapists
- Nurses
- Occupational therapists
- Orientation and mobility specialists
- Pediatricians and other physicians for diagnostic and evaluation purposes
- Physical therapists
- Psychologists
- Registered dietitians
- Social workers
- Special educators, including teachers of children with hearing impairments and teachers of children with visual impairments
- Speech and language pathologists
- Vision specialists, including ophthalmologists and optometrists
- Family Support Specialists (employed by a Montana qualified Early Intervention Services provider).

Montana Milestones requires each infant or toddler with a disability and the child's family be provided with one service coordinator. The **Family Support Specialist** is an Early Interventionist acting as service coordinator for **Montana Milestones** Part C services. A child's

parent(s) may choose to act as their service coordinator for specific service coordinator activities identified on their child's and family's IFSP.

The **Family Support Specialist** is responsible for coordinating all services required across agency lines; and serving as the single point of contact for carrying out the activities described in an active, ongoing process that involves assisting parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities in gaining access to, and coordinating the provision of, the early intervention services required and coordinating the other services identified in the IFSP needed by, or provided to, the infant or toddler with a disability and the child's family.

Service coordination services include:

- Assisting parent(s) of infants and toddlers with disabilities in obtaining access to needed early intervention services and other services identified in the IFSP including making referrals to providers for needed services and scheduling appointments for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;
- Coordinating the provision of early intervention services and other services, such as educational, social, and medical services that are not provided for diagnostic or evaluative purposes, the child needs;
- Coordinating evaluations and assessments;
- Facilitating and participating in the development, review, and evaluations of IFSPs;
- Conducting referral and other activities to assist families in identifying and connecting to available Early Intervention service providers;
- Coordinating, facilitating, and monitoring the delivery of services required under this part to ensure services are provided in a timely manner;
- Conducting follow-up activities to determine appropriate Part C services are being provided;
- Informing families of their rights and procedural safeguards;
- Coordinating the funding sources for services required; and
- Facilitating the development of a transition plan to preschool, school, or, if appropriate, to other services.

The **Early Interventionist**, who may also be a Family Support Specialist, is responsible for:

- Participating in identifying, screening, and referring infants and toddlers for multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment to determine those who are eligible for IDEA Part C services;

- Presenting and discussing information with the team, including the family, in non-technical language as well as the dominant language of the family;
- Participating in the implementation of IFSPs, including ongoing assessments;
- Work with the family collaboratively sharing and/or promoting activities using a variety of methods that advance the child and family's acquisition of skills in a variety of developmental areas;
- Implementing, in collaboration with the team, integrated IFSP outcomes within natural environments;
- Using a Primary coach approach to teaming as the lead program resource and point of contact among other program staff, the family, and other care providers (i.e., the team). The primary coach mediates the family's and other care providers' skills and knowledge in relation to a range of priorities and needed or desired resources. The established multidisciplinary team meets regularly and the primary coach receives coaching from other team members, and uses coaching with parents and other care providers to support and strengthen their confidence and competence in promoting child learning and development, and obtaining desired supports and resources in natural learning environments.
- Working with families and support persons in the child's natural environment to promote the development of the child in the implementation of the IFSP; and
- Identifying with the family, progress toward meeting IFSP outcomes and goals, through ongoing assessments.

Montana's vision for improving the EI services is guided by the mandates of the Federal law, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Recommended Practices (2014), as well as the evidence for effective interventions. The recommendations include seven topic areas providing guidance for practitioners:

- Leadership
- Assessment
- Environment
- Family
- Instruction
- Interaction
- Teaming and Collaboration
- Transition

Leadership

The work of Early Interventionists on the frontline is critical to improving outcomes for young children who have developmental delays/disabilities and their families. But practitioners do not operate in a vacuum. Their ability to implement the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices can be supported or constrained by the program, school, agency, or organization for which they work.

State and local leaders establish the conditions that are essential for the successful implementation of the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices by, for example, the policies and procedures they develop and implement. The set of practices in this section address the responsibilities of those in positions of program authority and leadership related to providing services to young children who have developmental delays/disabilities and their families. Examples of such leaders include state, regional, and local directors and other administrators; Family Support Specialists, therapists and other service providers.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices associated with leadership:

- Leaders create a culture and a climate in which the support team feels a sense of belonging and wants to support the organization's mission and goals.
- Leaders develop and implement policies, structures, and practices that promote shared decision making with the support team and families.
- Leaders belong to professional association(s) and engage in ongoing evidence-based professional development.
- Leaders advocate for policies and resources that promote the implementation of the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices.
- Leaders establish partnerships across levels (state to local) and with their counterparts in other systems and agencies to create coordinated and inclusive systems of services and supports.
- Leaders develop, refine, and implement policies and procedures that create the conditions for the support team to implement the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices.
- Leaders work across levels and sectors to secure fiscal and human resources and maximize the use of these resources to successfully implement the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices.
- Leaders develop and implement an evidence-based professional development system or approach that provides the support team a variety of supports to ensure they have the knowledge and skills needed to implement the **Montana Milestones** Recommended Practices.
- Leaders ensure the support team knows and follows professional standards and all applicable laws and regulations governing service provision.
- Leaders collaborate with higher education, state licensing and certification agencies, practitioners, professional associations, and other stakeholders to develop or revise state competencies that align with **Montana Milestones** and other national professional standards.
- Leaders collaborate with stakeholders to collect and use data for program management and continuous program improvement and to examine the effectiveness of services and supports in improving child and family outcomes.

- Leaders promote efficient and coordinated service delivery for children and families by creating the conditions for professionals from multiple disciplines and the family to work together as a team.
- Leaders collaborate with other agencies and programs to develop and implement ongoing community-wide screening procedures to identify and refer children who may need additional evaluation and services.

Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing process of gathering child and family information from a variety of sources to make decisions. As a result, assessment is a critical component of services for young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities and their families. In early intervention assessment is conducted for the purposes of screening, determining eligibility for services, individualized intervention planning, monitoring child progress, and measuring child outcomes.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices:

- Early Interventionists work with the family to identify preferences for assessment processes.
- A team of professionals work with the family to gather functional assessment information using appropriate materials and strategies based on the child's age and level of development to determine the child's eligibility and plan for instruction.
- To learn about the child's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests, information is gathered which includes all areas of development and behavior, and accommodates the child's sensory, physical, communication, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional characteristics.
- A variety of methods, including, observation and interviews, are used to gather assessment information about the child's skills and ability to engage in daily activities, routines, and environments such as home, center, and community from multiple sources, including the child's family and other significant individuals in the child's life.
- Assessments are conducted in the child's dominant language and in additional languages if the child is learning more than one language.
- A systematic and ongoing assessment is used to identify learning targets, plan activities and intervention, and to monitor the child's progress to revise instruction as needed.
- Assessment results are shared with families in an understandable and useful manner.

Environment

Young children who have developmental delays/disabilities learn, play, and engage with adults and peers within a variety of natural environments such as home, school, child care, and the neighborhood.

Environmental practices refer to aspects of the space, materials (toys, books, etc.), equipment, routines, and activities that the support team and families can intentionally alter to support each child's unique learning style.

The environmental practices addressed in this section encompass the physical environment (e.g., space, equipment, and materials), the social environment (e.g., interactions with peers, siblings, family members), and the temporal environment (e.g., sequence and length of routines and activities). They include supporting the child's access to learning opportunities and also empowering the family. It is important for the Early Intervention (EI) team to remember that these environmental dimensions are intertwined for young children who have developmental delays/disabilities and their families. Through implementation of the environmental practices, the support team and families can promote nurturing and responsive caregiving and learning environments that can foster each child's overall health and development.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices associated with the child's environment:

- Early Interventionists provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities to promote the child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- Early Interventionists consider the *Universal Design for Learning Principles* to create accessible environments. (<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl/3principles> source for definitions and descriptions of the three principles of *Universal Design for Learning*.)
- Early Interventionists work with the family and other adults to modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- Early Interventionists work with families and other adults to identify each child's needs for assistive technology to promote access to and participation in learning experiences.
- Early Interventionists work with families and other adults to acquire or create appropriate assistive technology to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
- Early Interventionists create environments that provide opportunities for movement and regular physical activity to maintain or improve fitness, wellness, and development across domains.

Family

Family practices refer to ongoing activities that (1) promote the active participation of families in decision-making related to their child (e.g., assessment, planning, and intervention); (2) lead to the development of an IFSP (e.g., a set of goals for the family and child and the services and supports to achieve those goals); and (3) support families in achieving the goals they hold for their child and family.

Family practices encompass three themes:

1. **Family-centered practices:** Practices that treat families with dignity and respect; are individualized, flexible, and responsive to each family's unique circumstances; provide family members complete and unbiased information to make informed decisions; and involve family members in acting on choices to strengthen child, parent, and family functioning.
2. **Family capacity-building practices:** Practices that include opportunities and experiences for families to strengthen existing parenting knowledge and skills, and promote the development of new parenting abilities that empower parents to advocate for their family.
3. **Family and professional collaboration:** Practices that build relationships between families and professionals who work together to achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes and goals that promote family competencies and support the development of the child.

Montana Milestones recommends the following family practices for the multidisciplinary support team:

- Early Interventionists build trusting and respectful partnerships with the family through interactions that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity.
- Early Interventionists provide the family with up-to-date, comprehensive and unbiased information in a way that the family can understand and use to make informed choices and decisions.
- Early Interventionists are responsive to the family's concerns, priorities, and changing life circumstances.
- Early Interventionists and the family work together to create outcomes or goals, develop individualized plans, and implement practices that address the family's priorities and concerns and the child's strengths and assessed needs.
- The multidisciplinary support team supports family functioning, promotes family confidence and competence, and strengthens family-child relationships by acting in ways that recognize and build on family strengths and capacities.
- Early Interventionists engage the family in opportunities that enhance and strengthen parenting knowledge and skills and parenting competence and confidence in ways that are flexible, individualized, and tailored to the family's preferences.
- Early Interventionists work with the family to identify, access, and use formal and informal resources and supports to achieve family-identified outcomes or goals.
- Early Interventionists provide the family of a young child who has developmental delay/disability, and who is a dual language learner, with information about the benefits of learning in multiple languages for the child's growth and development.
- Early Interventionists help families know and understand their rights.

- Early Interventionists inform families about leadership and advocacy skill-building opportunities and encourage those who are interested to participate.

Instruction

Instructional practices are the cornerstone of early intervention services. Early interventionists, family members, and other caregivers use instructional practices to maximize learning and improve developmental and functional outcomes for young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities.

Instructional practices are intentional and systematic strategies to inform what to teach, when to teach, how to evaluate the effects of the instruction and how to support and evaluate the quality of instructional practices implemented by others.

The recommended instructional practices are written from the perspective of the Early Interventionist with meaningful family engagement. An important instructional practice is the use coaching as an adult learning strategy with families, caregivers, and other adults to facilitate positive adult-child interactions and instruction to promote child learning and development. Based upon the individualization of a family's IFSP, a variety of service delivery opportunities may be available to families.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices associated with instruction:

- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, identify the child's strengths, preferences, and interests to engage the child in active learning within the context of their daily routine.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, identify skills to target instruction within routines that help the child become adaptive, competent, socially connected, and engaged with the most natural environment.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, observe and assess to make informed decisions about individualized instruction.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, plan for and provide the level of support, accommodations, and adaptations needed for the child to access, participate, and learn across routines.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, embed relevant learning opportunities that occur within the family's daily routines, activities and environments.
- Early Interventionists use evidence-based strategies with fidelity to engage families to teach skills that will promote their child's engagement and learning.
- Early Interventionists use explicit feedback through coaching with families in the use of positive behavior strategies to support their child's communication, play, and conversations by providing specific praise and encouragement of appropriate behavior.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, coach families and caregivers to use positive peer interactions to promote child engagement and learning at home and in the community.

- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, use functional assessments with coaching and intervention strategies to prevent and address challenging behaviors.
- Early Interventionists, with meaningful family engagement, implement the frequency, intensity, and duration of instruction and coaching needed by the family to achieve the child's outcomes or goals.
- Early Interventionists provide instructional support and resources to families in their native language to achieve the child and family's desired outcomes.

Interaction

The interactions between a child and his/her family are the foundation which promote the child's development. Positive interactions represent a critical set of strategies for fostering a child's social-emotional competence, communication, cognitive development, problem-solving, autonomy, and persistence. Child and family interactions will vary depending on the child's developmental levels and family's cultural and linguistic background. Early interventionists assist family members, caregivers, and peers utilizing a coaching model in implementing specific ways to engage in sensitive and responsive interaction with their child to promote development across environments, routines, and activities. Early Interventionists also investigate multiple evidence-based practices to determine those most useful to meet the individualized needs of the child and family.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices to support interaction:

- Early Interventionists support the family to promote the child's social-emotional development by observing, interpreting, and responding in a positive manner to the range of the child's emotional expressions.
- Early Interventionists support the family through coaching, modeling, teaching, feedback, or other types of guided support to promote the child's social development by encouraging the child to initiate or sustain positive interactions with other children and adults during routines and activities.
- Early Interventionists support the family in the use of observation, interpretation, and how to respond in a positive manner to the child's verbal and non-verbal communication and by using language to label and expand on the child's requests, needs, preferences, or interests.
- Early Interventionists support the family to promote the child's cognitive development by observing, interpreting, and responding intentionally to the child's exploration, play, and social activity by joining in and expanding on the child's focus, actions, and intent.
- Early Interventionists support the family to promote the child's problem-solving behavior by observing, interpreting, and build on foundational skills in response to the child's growing level of self-knowledge and self-regulation.

Teaming and Collaboration

By their nature, services for young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities involve more than one adult. Teaming and collaboration practices promote and sustain adult partnerships, relationships, and ongoing interactions to ensure that programs and services achieve desired child and family outcomes and goals. The team includes the family as an essential

member and practitioners from multiple disciplines as needed. The teaming and collaboration practices include strategies for interacting and sharing knowledge and expertise in ways that are respectful, supportive, enhance capacity, and are culturally sensitive.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices:

- Early Interventionists representing multiple disciplines and families work together as a team to plan and implement supports and access services to meet the unique needs of each child and family.
- Early Interventionists and families work together as a collaborative team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity, develop a plan, and jointly solve problems and implement interventions.
- Early Interventionists use communication and group facilitation strategies to enhance collaboration, team functioning and interpersonal relationships among team members.
- Team members assist each other to discover and access community-based services and other informal and formal resources to meet family-identified child or family needs.
- Early Interventionists and families may collaborate with each other to identify one practitioner from the team who serves as the primary liaison between the family and other team members based on child and family priorities and assessed needs.

Transition

Transition refers to the events, activities, and processes associated with key changes between environments or programs during the early childhood years. For infants and toddlers in **Montana Milestones** Part C Early Intervention Program, these changes occur at the transition into the Part C early intervention program, the transition out of early intervention (around the child's 3rd birthday) to community early childhood programs or the potential transition into preschool special education services (Part B/619) provided by the local school district. As with other life transitions or changes, positive relationships - in this case, positive Early Interventionists/family and teacher/child relationships - are associated with greater satisfaction, better adjustment, and better child outcomes.

Montana Milestones recommends the following practices associated with transition:

- Early Interventionists exchange information before, during, and after transition regarding strategies most likely to support the child's successful adjustment and positive outcomes with personnel from other environments or programs.
- Early Interventionists use a variety of planned and timely strategies with the child and family before, during, and after the transition to support successful adjustment and positive outcomes for both the child and family.
- Early Interventionists work closely with families to ensure timely and seamless transitions following Montana Part C Rules and Regulations and Federal guidelines.*

*Timelines are denoted in Montana's Part C Compliance Document: Conformity with Federal Rules and Regulations, Revised July, 2013.

Citations

Division for Early Childhood. (2014). *DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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